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ABSTRACT

In a study of how decisions were made in 24 restructuring schools (Kirby and Bogotch 1993), teachers claimed to have considerable decision authority. Teachers in most of the schools, however, reported that decision making was based on existing knowledge of the internal group. The Kirby and Bogotch (1993) model, developed from that study, links two concepts of power--power as decision authority and power as knowledge--to restructuring. This paper presents findings of a study that tested the assumption that decision authority alone is insufficient for transformation of the core technology. In particular, the study attempted to determine what "empowerment" meant to teachers and administrators in a successfully restructuring district, the St. Charles Parish public school district (Louisiana). Data were obtained through 4 focus-group interviews with a total of 49 central-office administrators, elementary-school teachers and principals; and an interview with the superintendent. Findings indicate that empowerment is not confined to the granting of decision authority. Decision authority must be complemented by information access and organizational efficacy (the belief that schools can make a difference for all children) with regard to student learning. When empowerment includes authority, knowledge, and efficacy, organizational transformation is possible. Two figures are included. (LMI)

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Empowerment and Information Utilization within a Restructuring School District

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Empowerment and Information Utilization within a Restructuring School District

Peggy C. Kirby & Ira E. Bogotch

As schools continue to experiment with new governance and decision-making designs, traditional ideas about the meaning of power are questioned (Maxcy, 1994). Empowerment in school restructuring contexts is most typically associated with changes in governance structure (e.g., school-based management, shared decision making, partnerships, and collaborative communities) such that school-based actors have greater decision authority. Often, changes in core technology (i.e., teaching and learning) are secondary to governance reform (Murphy, 1991). Simply increasing the number of participants in decision making has not led to significant changes either in power relationships or in daily school practices (Blase & Kirby, 1992; Kirby, 1992; Taylor & Bogotch, 1994). Further, decisions made by "empowered" teachers often focus on housekeeping and management issues rather than academics (Kirby, 1992). We contend that the meaning given to the concept of empowerment will determine the extent to which restructuring schools are successful in transforming traditional teaching and learning.

In a study of how decisions were made in 24 restructuring schools (Kirby & Bogotch, 1993), teachers claimed to have considerable decision authority. Teachers in most of these schools, however, reported that decision making was based on existing knowledge of the internal group. New sources of information were rarely sought or used; not unexpectedly, shared decision making generated few innovative practices. Where teachers detailed changes in practice, they also described seeking and using information from a greater number of sources. The authors proposed a model linking participatory decision making and information utilization to "generative" ideas (Prawat, 1991) that transform practice.

The Kirby and Bogotch (1993) model links two concepts of power--power as decision authority and power as knowledge--to transformation or restructuring.[1] The authors proposed that decision authority alone would not result in transformation of the core technology. To test this assumption, we selected one school district that was renowned for having successfully changed classroom practices as well as roles and relationships over a five-year period. Practitioners at all levels (i.e., superintendent, central office administrators, principals, and teachers) in the system were asked in focus

[1]We use the term restructuring to mean changes not only in governance, but also in roles and relationships, and, most importantly, in core technology (Murphy, 1991).

groups what restructuring meant to them and how it came about in their district. Respondents were never prompted to discuss empowerment, decision authority, or information utilization. Instead, we sought to understand if and how these variables contributed to the district's success in restructuring. Thus, our purpose was to determine what "empowerment" meant to teachers and administrators in a successfully restructuring school district.

Changing Conceptions of Power

The concept of power in organizational theory, and educational administration specifically, has been expanded to include all individuals who may be able to contribute to the improvement of schools and students' education (Maxcy, 1994). Where traditionally power was defined by roles, positional authority, rules, and policies (Mechanic, 1962), such closed-system boundaries are now viewed as only one factor of the larger political and social dynamics (Pfeffer, 1978, 1981). Standing alongside the structural bases of power are (1) relationships and support predicated on equality, (2) participation concerned with giving voice to those previously excluded from decision-making (Johnston, 1994), (3) knowledgeable discourse of [school] practice (Johnston, 1994), and (4) moral processes regarding the use of power (Miron & Elliott, 1994).

The above depiction openly crosses paradigmatic lines of modernist, postmodernist, and poststructuralist conceptions of power. While it is true that historical definitions of power focused primarily on leader behaviors (Hersey, Blanchard, & Natemeyer, 1979), leader characteristics (French & Raven, 1959), and their effects on intra-organizational relationships, that literature, too, struggled over the use of power by "lower participants" (Mechanic, 1962) and the influence of environmental factors (Pfeffer, 1978, 1981; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1989). French and Raven (1959) recognized not only a structural basis for legitimate power, but also a cultural one -- a theme adopted and expanded by postmodernist theorists on power (e.g., Johnston, 1994). In fact, within modernists' scholarship, political models introduced influence (Bacharach & Lawler, 1982); sociological models introduced cultural and social norms; and psychological studies introduced self-control and efficacy (Langer, 1983). Each of these themes has evolved into more cultural and subjective bases of power, inside and out of organizations.

French and Raven (1959) developed their taxonomy of the five bases of power from observable changes in behaviors (i.e., behaviors of the agent who exerts power and reactions of the recipient of the behavior). Yet, they acknowledged that "internalization of social norms is a related process of decreasing degree of dependence of behavior on an external O and increasing dependence on an internal value" (p. 201). Mechanic (1962) saw that social norms such as access to information, expertise, an individual's commitment, effort, and interest were as potent as position and rules. Pfeffer (1978) and Hersey et al. (1979), too, labeled information as the key to political power and leadership behavior, respectively.

Bacharach and Lawler (1982) understood that political models added a multidirectionality to power. They criticized French and Raven as too closely aligned to authority and hierarchy (i.e. intra-organizational factors)--even when information was added to the taxonomy (p. 33)--while ignoring environmental and institutional dynamics. Instead, Bacharach and Lawler suggested four sources of power: office or structural position, personal characteristics, expertise, and opportunity. They distinguished between power as authority and power as influence. Only their first source related to authority; the other three pertained to influence (pp. 36-37).

Perhaps the two most consistent findings from the evolving literature on power are its multidirectionality and multidimensionality. Multidirectionality adopts the political model of influence and information, giving greater weight to relationships and coalitions among leaders and followers. Multidirectionality also introduces voluntary participation in decision-making processes. The second finding, multidimensionality, accepts the view of power as having many perspectives--structural, cultural, social, political, psychological, etc. Overall, these changes indicate that directionality is moving away from formal organizational structures of authority to individual capacity, expertise, and actions. Thus, more attention is being given to individual agency (Miron & Elliott, 1994), particularly by poststructuralists. Nevertheless, school organizational structures have not been rendered irrelevant. Neither has the concept of authority. While power as knowledge is taken more seriously today than ever before, power as authority is still very much accepted and expected. The dichotomy of power as authority and knowledge encompasses multidirectional dynamics and multidimensional constructs. We know too much about the difficulties of change and implementation (Fullan, 1993) to reduce prescriptions for successful school restructuring to either structural solutions or human agency alone.

Exercising Power: Empowerment in Schools

The discussion on the changing conceptions of power serves as a backdrop for reviewing studies on the related concept of "empowerment." It was not surprising to us that the empirical literature on empowerment parallels many of the developments in research on power. We found both multidirectionality and multidimensionality in studies on empowerment. Personal characteristics were linked to organizational relationships and opportunities (Short, 1994). As structures change, roles change, not only for leaders (Bredeson, 1994) [i.e., especially principals, but also including community leaders, government, and business], but also for followers (Short & Greer, 1994) [i.e., teachers, parents, students]. Yet, increased participation in decision-making alone was insufficient. Still, decisional participation is necessary, particularly when it increases the sources, access, and valuing of information (Kirby & Bogotch, 1993). There was, however, no prescriptive formula for this occurrence. In essence, empirical studies of empowerment, regardless of their unit of analysis, all conclude that empowerment is conceptually and contextually complex, having multiple, if not, interrelated dimensions (Short, 1994), grounded in school work-life obstacles and contingencies (Bogotch & Stack,

1993).

Empirical studies on empowerment have been conducted within restructuring contexts. A review of this research indicates that empowerment always results from contingencies related to situations, relations, self-determinations, and growth. Bredeson (1994) and Peel and Walker (1994) selected principals as their unit of analysis. The most important factor for the 20 principals in Bredeson's study was the "commitment to systematically engage teachers in decisions that affect their worklives in schools" (p. 216). Bredeson's (1994) list of four dimensions of empowerment includes process, identity, opportunity for autonomous professional behavior, and a professional work environment. He also describes threats to empowerment such as new roles, conflict, limited time, and money. From their study of 26 principals, Peel and Walker provide evidence that empowerment is successfully supported--in spite of the potential threats--through a willingness to take risks, a willingness to communicate, and an awareness of potential problems.

Short (1994) found six dimensions of teacher empowerment from her three-year [1989-1992] study on empowerment. Her list combines organizational structures with professional and personal development opportunities. Structurally, involvement in decision making is one dimension, usually including commitment as well as professional participation. The second dimension is teacher impact, a factor which encompasses both the importance of teacher worklives (Bredeson, 1994) and classroom concerns (Kirby, 1992). The dimensions of teacher status, autonomy, and opportunities for professional development closely parallel the dimensions Bredeson derived from his study of principals. The sixth dimension, teacher self-efficacy, is a psychological construct that may be influenced by principals' willingness to take risks and communicate, and awareness of potential problems (Peel and Walker, 1994).

Obstacles or threats to empowerment are decidedly contextual (Bogotch & Stack, 1993). Teacher empowerment studies conducted in urban settings are likely to be less optimistic, emphasizing what Dandridge (1993) calls critical conditions. While other empirical studies are not unmindful of critical conditions, they may not have emphasized the degree of difficulty found within urban settings. Dandridge's list of obstacles include the lack of resources, time, teacher status, and teacher salaries. When so much energy is expended in securing basic resources, change and success are not at all assured (Taylor, Bogotch, & Kirby, 1994; Tripp, 1988). By the time that some teachers get involved in decision making or become aware of opportunities for professional development (Short, 1992), new threats and fears arise, thus, creating continuing cycles of resistance and cynicism.

Information as power

Broadening concept of empowerment beyond governance issues, it becomes clear that decisional participation requires expert knowledge for problem-solving, decision-

making (Blase & Kirby, 1992; Kirby, 1992), and idea generation (Prawat, 1993). Empirical evidence supports this claim. Bredeson (1994) reported that teachers in schools involved in change "read the literature and the research" (p. 209). Taylor, Bogotch, and Kirby (1994) found this to be true across organizational levels in a successfully restructuring district--from the superintendent to central office administrators, principals, and teachers.

The historical literature on power offers a starting point for understanding expertise. French and Raven's (1959) expert base of power was a reciprocal relationship linked to both the internal content of communication and external information. In that the former may be more about referent and position power, only the latter is viewed as "expert." Their early findings found that expert power was more limited in scope than referent; nevertheless, it was expert power that led to more independence over time (p. 204). Hersey et al. (1979) compared expert power with a sixth base of power, namely, information. They found that information [i.e., a "leader's possession of or access to information that is perceived as valuable to others" (p. 249)] was rated right below expert power as having a "significant impact on the behavior of people" (p. 250). In their situational leadership model, expert and information bases permit both delegation and participation to succeed.

More recently, Kirby and Bogotch (1993) explored the relationship among shared decision making, information utilization, and innovative practices in 24 restructuring schools. A somewhat paradoxical finding discovered by the authors was that the greater the time demands and conflicts posed by shared decision making, especially for principals, the more teachers became involved in decision making, sought multiple sources of information, and valued information. Kirby and Bogotch (1993) found three processes present in effective, albeit time-consuming, decision making: change was considered as experiments; decision making was collaborative; and reforms were evaluated in terms of benefits to students. They proposed that empowerment in effective school change consists of decision participation and information utilization and is accomplished through experimentation, collaboration, and reflection. The present study is an extension of this work. It utilizes focus group interviews in a successfully restructuring school district to determine practitioners' perceptions of the bases of power in restructuring contexts and the processes associated with the exercise of power.

Method

The St. Charles Parish public school district was chosen for its reputation throughout Louisiana as having undergone a successful restructuring effort over a five-year period. In an earlier study to understand what practitioners mean by the term "restructuring," we found that practitioners in St. Charles Parish consistently talked about changes in classroom practices, including whole language, teaming, student-led conferences, outcomes-based education, cooperative learning, and reading recovery. Practitioners in another district spoke in far more general terms and far less frequently about teaching and learning (see Taylor, Bogotch, & Kirby, 1994). Thus, St. Charles was

chosen through this empirical evidence as well as its statewide reputation.

Four focus group interviews and one individual interview were used to gather data. We chose focus groups to increase the size of the sample and to capitalize on group interaction as a method of confirming and disconfirming individual understandings. Indeed, we found that in several instances group members clarified or expanded the statements of others. They frequently used statements such as "Just to piggyback on what ____ said, I also ..." or "If I may interject something very different...."

The superintendent was interviewed by both researchers. Other participants were invited to attend one of four focus groups. The first three groups consisted of individuals within distinct organizational levels: one for central office administrators, one for principals, and a third for teachers. The fourth group consisted of employees from across these three levels in order to determine if the discourse was substantially different across levels than within levels. Two central office administrators agreed to draw a representative sample of teachers from all elementary schools and a sample of central office personnel representing all specializations. Although these cannot be considered random, the central office sample included 11 administrators from various departments, including information management, curriculum and instruction, social services, and evaluation. The teacher sample represented 12 elementary schools. Because the discourse was overwhelmingly positive and consistent, interviewers asked teachers how a different group might have responded. A chorus of enthusiastic respondents challenged us to "go to any school, talk to any teacher." Every elementary principals participated either in the principal focus group or cross-level group. Ten participants attended each focus group. Although no attemt is made to triangulate methods in this study (student interviews will be used in a later study), triangulation of data sources was possible from the five focus groups. In all, these discussions yielded 101 pages of single-spaced typed transcripts.

Content analysis was used first to determine the extent to which discussants viewed empowerment as an element of restructuring and the meaning attached to the terms "power" and "empowerment," then to determine whether the elements of the Kirby and Bogotch (1993) model accurately described empowerment in one restructuring district. In the first analysis, power and various forms of power--authority, connections, expertise, information, reward, coercion, and referent power (Hersey, Blanchard, & Natemeyer, 1979; adapted from French & Raven, 1959)--were used as initial codes. In the second iteration, processes related to use of information and participation were described. The Kirby and Bogotch processes--collaboration, experimentation, and reflection--comprised a priori codes but two additional processes--focusing and learning emerged from the data. Results involving the impetus, elements, and effects of restructuring are reported elsewhere (Taylor, Bogotch, & Kirby, 1994).

Two broad themes related to power emerged: power as decision authority and power as knowledge. The data revealed that these sources of power were

complementary and interactive. Other forms of power were mentioned infrequently. Although there was occasional deference to the superintendent, especially by one central office administrator, no individual emerged as charismatic or visionary (i.e., as having referent power). No participants associated participation in restructuring with coercion or extrinsic reward. No one was perceived as more powerful because of a relationship (connection power) with the superintendent or board. One central office administrator was perceived as particularly knowledgeable in curriculum and instruction and there was a genuine respect for this expertise expressed by teachers and principals. Nevertheless, power was associated almost exclusively with decision authority and information.

Power as Authority

The terms "power" or "empowerment" were used 28 times by the 49 respondents in 16 separate exchanges. The word "authority" was used only twice, both times by a central office supervisor. In this section we discuss references to power as authority over decision making. Three themes were most prevalent with regard to power as authority: 1) a perception that power had shifted away from the central office, 2) greater decision authority for teachers and principals, and 3) greater responsibility for students. A related theme was the overall acceptance of decision authority as an expected, even "matter-of-fact" element of daily business. We begin by discussing authority from the perspectives of various roles in the system.

According to the Superintendent, central office supervisors felt that they lost power in the district restructuring effort:

> ...Central office people feel that they lose power, they lose responsibility, they lose stature or what have you. And I don't believe that. I believe that their roles change--from directing kinds of roles...to facilitating kinds of roles. It takes some time to do it...it's most difficult on the ones who have been in office the longest. They tend to be locked in to the way it was.

Central office supervisors did not confirm this belief. Instead, one supervisor spoke of being empowered by the direction set by the current superintendent.

> I see it as an empowerment in that we had a person, the superintendent, who was able to set directions to where we could move a lot quicker than we had in the past. He established a direction, he empowered people below him. He expected results. But you know, leadership has a lot to do with that, and then passing that leadership on to the next level down, assistant superintendents and other administrative staff, on out to the schools and empowering principals and teachers. I think it has a lot to do with the person in charge.

> Although the central office staff did not mention explicitly that the budgets and

decisions that were now under school control had been under their control, the superintendent and some principals did feel that the shifting power structure had concerned some central office personnel. As one principal observed, the instructional supervisors seemed more comfortable with the changes than the administrative and support services directors. She acknowledged that these individuals were slower to "get on board" but that they would because they had "the same dedication."

There was a general belief that authority over decision making had shifted downward to the school level. Two central office administrators commented on the increased decision authority of principals and their perceptions of feelings associated with the new responsibilities:

> There are higher expectations of principals now. I mean the central office staff is shrinking. And more is expected of the principals in terms of instruction and staff development. And they have more responsibilities. The pressure has definitely increased on the principal. They have more authority now than they ever had.

> I think they're stressed, but I think they're excited, on the other hand, about having that authority...to make those decisions.... But I'm sure they're stressed because it's going to be a lot more of...they have to share those decision-making processes with others within their schools. For some that's going to be a little more difficult than for others.... I still think the financial end of it is going to be most difficult for them in deciding how to spend those dollars that are now in their budgets that used to be in somebody else's budget. I think they're excited and anxious.

Although principals did not speak of greater authority at the school level, teachers frequently commented on school-level decision making. Teachers spoke of their own empowerment in terms of decision authority rather matter-of-factly. Several teachers spoke directly to this issue; no teacher lamented a lack of decision authority.

> Teachers are being empowered. We're being asked for input. We're becoming the motivating force as far as getting programs to work in this community. It's not so much we will do this because central office says you will do this; it's because we know it works and we have considerable say-so in what's happening in the parish.

Teachers appreciated that decisions were being made at the school level and that their input was actively sought:

> We have advisory committees in each building....we are empowered to do some of the things we feel our school needs.

> There's so much more polling, surveying, before policies are made, before

> changes are made. It's no longer, "Well, this is it and live with it." That's again that empowerment of the principals, the teachers.

Teachers equated their empowerment with professionalism:

> Restructuring has also brought back a degree of professionalism that had declined for years.... It empowered us in our rooms to look at the 30 children in our rooms and say, "this child doesn't need this; this child needs this." And it'll be OK to give the child what the child needs, to slow down the curriculum, increase the curriculum, enhance it, modify it, whatever, to meet our needs....

In addition to their sense of empowerment, teachers felt that restructuring had empowered parents, the community, and children as well. Several teachers referred to parental involvement in decision making. Even more, including these three, mentioned that children were empowered:

> We've empowered those children because the children know they can learn. We know the child's strengths and we capitalize on those strengths.

> I find it's given children so much more power that they kind of direct you to what they want to learn. Some things you expand and some things that you had planned on expanding you stop because they're ready to stop at that point. That's what I really like about it. They have more empowerment in the classroom and they tell you where they want to go. And I think with that they learn a lot more....

> Children also have been empowered because they will come to you and say, I didn't do very well in that lst activity that we did....I'd like to do it again. I'd like to learn more about it." "Gee, we have to move on," according to the old curriculum and the old pacing. "I'm sorry. You can't learn any more about this until next year." I like being able to say, "Okay."

Another teacher explained that children became more responsible through outcomes based curricula:

> They're seeing that teachers don't pull grades out of the air.... They know if they lost a point where they lost it and what they can do to improve on it. The teachers are empowered, but the students are also. They know how to make an A and they can make the choice.... It's not the teacher any more. It's not, "What did you give me?" It's, "What did I make?"

It should be noted that no respondent spoke of power in negative terms. No one lamented that someone else had too much power or that s/he had too little. Indeed, decision making at the school site appeared to be so institutionalized that it was taken

for granted. The more potent and more frequently discussed base of power for this community appeared to be the power of knowledge.

Power as Knowledge

French and Raven (1969) included information as one of their five bases of social power. Although information/knowledge would seem to be an important form of power in schools, Kirby and Bogotch (1993) found that information--particularly from external sources--was actually devalued in most school-level decision making. They proposed that the valuing of knowledge coupled with the valuing of school-based decision authority would lead to more successful school change. In the case of St. Charles Parish, knowledge utilization was the most frequently discussed of the power bases.

Power was linked explicitly to knowledge by actors from across all levels. The superintendent viewed his role as setting a direction for the district, informed by the best available research knowledge. He says, "And you can't do that from the vantage point of power, that does not work. You can't force people to think in a particular way...maybe you can force people to act in a particular way, but you can't force them to be committed to those actions.... But students are now experiencing teaching that is better informed by the research literature and the training associated with the research literature." A central office administrator concurred that the "direction" set by the superintendent heavily relied on professional development:

> What we've discovered is that you've got to put your money in staff development if you're going to expect any sort of restructuring or any sort of continual improvement. If you starve that budget, everything else goes. So we are in the business of empowering folks through giving them knowledge.... I seriously worry about school districts that talk about restructuring but don't have an awfully powerful staff development program.

Another central office administrator saw her role as providing information to teachers so that they could make decisions about what is best for their classrooms. At first blush, this finding may seem to indicate that central office uses the information provider role to justify its existence as norms and expectations within the district change. However, the importance of information is voiced just as strongly by principals and teachers.

Teachers viewed the opportunity to acquire new knowledge, coupled with decision authority about what information to use, as a sign of trust in their professionalism. They viewed continuous learning as the way of doing business in St. Charles Parish; probably because information was shared as a tool for decision making rather than as an advance decision on best practice, expectations for staff development were perceived as positive. One teacher explains:

> It is understood when you sign a contract in St. Charles Parish, you will be in training. This would go on for the rest of your life until you're six feet under.... We're expected to come in and be able to share what we learned and what we are doing so that the learning process keeps on going for teachers. We're treated as professionals. I've worked in other parishes earlier in my career, but I can say that here I've been treated as though I know what I'm talking about. They give me the information, now you go out and we expect you to do it. We're not going to coddle you and follow right behind you and stand outside the hallway and listen, one ear to the door. You're expected to do this....

School Improvement Through Participation and Information

The two primary power bases--knowledge and participative decision authority--support the core values of the Kirby and Bogotch (1993) model of school improvement through decision participation and information utilization (see Figure 1). To further test the model, the data were coded on the basis of its key elements. These elements include mediators (past experiences with staff development, information access, commitment to change, school improvement initiatives, and use of time), and decision making and information use processes (collaboration, experimentation, and reflection). They are supported by two core values: information and decision participation.

Mediators of information use and decision participation

Kirby and Bogotch proposed that information use and decision participation are two key components of effective school restructuring. In their model, the valuing of both participative decision authority and information are related to school improvement. They suggest that the effects of these core values will be mediated by prior experiences with school reform, staff development, use of time, teacher commitment to change, and access to information; that is, negative experiences in these areas will adversely influence attempts to increase decision participation and information use. The St. Charles experience suggests that these variables did not present barriers to change. In fact, participant beliefs about these elements are reflective of the strength of the information and participation values. Thus, beliefs about time, staff development, etc. are as much outcome variables as they are mediating variables, as depicted by the bi-directional arrow in Figure 1.

Experiences with past reform efforts in St. Charles were not perceived negatively. Quite the contrary, participants were hard-pressed to articulate exactly when, why, or how restructuring began in their district. Neither can we identify a point in time when the values of information and participation began to take shape. Thus, our data do not allow us to draw conclusions about how these key values influence teacher commitment, time, or staff development. Indeed, these may be both causes and effects of information and participation valuing, as Kirby and Bogotch suggest, but we are unable to support this assertion. We do know that in this district, where information use and decision

participation are valued and practiced, the variables identified as mediators by Kirby and Bogotch are perceived as facilitators of restructuring.

Information access and staff development. Access to information was provided through financial support for staff development and through "turn-around" training. Unlike in the typical district of the Kirby and Bogotch (1993) study, St. Charles Parish personnel sought access to information both from within and from external sources.

St. Charles had a 20-year history of intensive professional development, according to district and school administrators. Funding was supported first through federal grants secured by the Federal Programs Director, and more recently by support from local industry which is a partner in the restructuring plan. Unlike many surrounding districts, teachers and administrators were given considerable funding for travel and training related to professional development.

In addition to support for direct training, opportunities to acquire new knowledge were expanded to greater numbers of people through what the district called "turn-around" training. Anyone who attended a professional conference was expected to share the new knowledge with others in the district. Because of this, teachers asserted that much of their training "comes from other teachers."

Among the specific training opportunities available to teachers since formally restructuring were whole language, outcomes-based education, reading recovery, alternative assessment, effective schooling, accelerated schools, site-based management, developmentally appropriate practice, and total quality management. Knowledge was sought externally through travel to exemplary sites, attending professional conferences, disseminating professional literature, and hiring expert consultants. The central office staff was perceived by teachers to be scanners for new knowledge ("They are out there on the national forefront, finding out what's working"), connecting the external and internal environments.

Internally, teachers were encouraged to visit other schools in the system and to use turn-around training. Additionally, teachers and school administrators frequently used the district's information management system to secure data relative to individual student and school progress. All schools are tied into the IMS for data retrieval. The emphasis on individual student progress is facilitated by such access. Teachers reported that the belief that "all children can learn" becomes an actuality when they can access data at the student level and implement individually appropriate strategies. "We find their individual needs and try to make the best we can of each and every one of them.... You start seeing that ...we're almost at a point where we can eliminate the word 'virtually' in 'every student will learn.' I mean it's getting closer and closer to 'all.'"

Prior school improvement initiatives. Prior experiences with school improvement were perceived as beneficial by some teachers. For example, a group of teachers viewed

a statewide program that had been phased out as the seed of current restructuring in reading. Others viewed the current movement as different in that it was based on bottom-up decision making and greater use of information before implementation:

> It's no longer, "OK, we met in a meeting yesterday and this is what we decided and here it is right now. Go hither and implement." It's more, "OK, we're going to call a meeting. Let's get some feedback.... Share with us your feelings on this.... What kind of effect is this going to have?" There's so much more polling, surveying before policies are made, before changes are made.

Teacher commitment to change. In addition to decision authority and information access, teachers related their current level of commitment to change to positive effects for students ("Suddenly we had programs that were meeting almost every child's needs") and professional growth opportunities ("...when you have professional growth, you are rejuvenated"). Teachers discussed increased commitment resulting from restructuring; three teachers claimed to have foregone retirement due to renewed excitement about teaching.

Time demands. Kirby and Bogotch (1993) found that lack of time was perceived as a barrier to decision participation and information use but that schools that spent more time in decision making were generally more satisfied with decisions made. Respondents in St. Charles Parish confirmed the need to devote time for collaborative decision making.

The superintendent worked through the state board of education to increase the time available for teacher participation in decision making. He perceived time as a difficult barrier to overcome: "The reason you are not going to get even more collaboration is not because teachers are unwilling.... By and large, the time is not there. That's the bottom line."

Principals discussed time, not as a barrier, but as a sacrifice that they and teachers willingly made. About teachers district-wide, one principal claimed:

> They are willing to come on Saturdays; they're willing to come at night. They might complain, but they're excited, too. And we're giving up a lot of time. [Teachers] don't mind staying after school. I see more teachers staying after school working in their classrooms than ever before. [Other principals nodded in agreement.]

Teachers confirmed that they gave freely of their time ("I'm so happy about what I do that I give up my lunch time"; "We make time for planning"), but agreed that district administrators recognized and rewarded the need for planning time:

> ...what I'm finding is that administrators are realizing that in order for teachers

> to be good at what we do, we need time. And I'm finding that in this parish they're recognizing that teachers need in-school time, first of all, to talk to one another, to do some of the planning. And the assessment that we're now doing is so much more time-consuming than it used to be... And although it's not as much planning time as some teachers think we need, it's getting there. They really are recognizing the fact that to do a good job, you need to give us time.... Our daily schedule is changing because there are blocks of [non-instructional] time built into it.

Not only did the district support planning and collaboration through the schedule, it also supported professional development and collaboration with stipends. Two principals stressed this important aspect of district support:

> Principal 1: And the district says, "Yes. We value that. We'll give you some time to plan together." So that's where the support from the district comes.
> Principal 2: "And we're gonna pay you."
> Principal 1 (in agreement): "And we're gonna pay you."

Thus, the anticipated mediators of information use and decision participation did not present significant barriers in this district. We contend that the clear and consistent valuing of information and decision participation throughout the system tempered traditional constraints in St. Charles Parish. The data reveal that information valuing and access were advanced most clearly by the superintendent and central office. While decision authority was transferred to the school level, new roles in information use are acquired by top level administrators. Evidence of the three processes required for effective use of information in schoolwide decision making--collaboration, reflection, and experimentation (Kirby & Bogotch, 1993)--were presented throughout the focus group discussions.

Processes related to information valuing

Information valuing was conveyed by the superintendent in his words and actions. In spite of considerable controversy in a neighboring district over adding half days to the school calendar, the superintendent pushed to increase the number of half days in his district so that teachers could spend more time in professional development, "for collaboration and for customizing the curriculum to meet the needs of the students in individual classrooms and individual schools." Focusing on children emerged as an important aspect of the superintendent's role. While this focus was clearly evident across organizational levels, the superintendent viewed his role not as day-to-day decision maker, but as promoter of continuous learning for the sake of children. In his words and actions, he supported professional development, experimentation, and evaluation for "positive change." Although the superintendent clearly valued change ("You can get better or you can get worse, but you cannot maintain the status quo"), he

insisted that change be based on best available evidence. "Restructuring," he said, "entails a willingness to change any and all components, structures, programs, processes of the school system that you have reason to believe-- through empirical research, or theoretical reasons, or common sense--are going to make a positive change." He saw training at all levels as the mechanism for continuous improvement and choice as the process for ensuring success:

> We will not willy-nilly retrofit new elements into our existing system. Rather, we will study, reflect, and make use of the best minds in the country as we develop a comprehensive, well-integrated picture of restructuring. We will intelligently restructure. In short, when the bandwagons roll through St. Charles Parish, they will leave empty because we will not be jumping on.

This acquisition and filtering of information through learning, reflection and experimentation emerged as important themes in all discussions. The superintendent explained that teachers had been trained in effective schools and outcomes-based education, but quickly added that what they called outcomes-based education was "not the national model. Nothing we ever do here is the national model. We always tailor it."

Central office administrators echoed the valuing of information acquisition through staff development. As the Curriculum and Instruction Supervisor noted, "Industry can relate to this.... They know what training is all about and you know they've been spending good money on training." He recounted a long history of professional development opportunities in the district and credited this investment with the district's success in restructuring. Like the superintendent, he stressed the importance of adapting new learning to the unique organizational needs of the district:

> I've always been able to bring back good ideas form conferences also. And I have been given the freedom to apply our own special touches to what we are bringing back, which is good too. I've never been forced to apply something someone else is doing just because they're doing it.

The valuing and filtering of information are most clearly expressed by three principals in this exchange:

> You see we're not so stuck up as to think that we're the only place that's doing anything.... We're going other places. We hear about exciting things; we read about it; our teachers hear about it; we go.
>
> And we come back and we use what we can of it and we don't swallow it.
>
> Right, whole hog. We use what we can from it. We build on it.

Teachers felt that administrators expressed their value of continuous learning by financially supporting staff development and by attending training sessions with their teachers. Teachers also valued the training they received and their ability to choose how much of the new information they would incorporate into their practice:

> Anytime we attend anything we give feedback. That feedback is not trashed. It doesn't go through the shredder. It is always read. We choose our own workshops, our own training...because people have always listened to us.

Once again, the ability to modify, accept, or reject innovations was related to the valuing of information utilization. Participants from every level expressed a trust in restructuring that they attributed to their ability to learn, experiment, and reflect on the effects of their trials. The lens used in reflection/evaluation always focused on children:

> Principal: We've all come through the system, and we always were looking for ways to improve to benefit kids. I mean, that's kind of our philosophy, continuous improvement to benefit kids.
>
> Teacher: And you have to remember that we've been blessed with visionaries at the district level. You know, people who really knew where they wanted to move us, not just skip along in the meadow this way and then try that meadow. They knew where we wanted to be, because of what's good for kids.

Processes related to valuing of decision participation

Participants presented considerable evidence supporting collaboration as the key process for making decisions in their district. They cited examples of collaboration in goal setting, planning, experimenting, and evaluating. Everyone agreed that community input was sought and valued in the restructuring movement. One teacher explained:

> A major part of the restructuring was turning education over to the community, not just to the schools and the teachers. We involve parents. When we set up our outcomes, we involved business and industry.... When we set our goals, the outcomes we want our children to meet, everyone had input into that. It was sent to the total community for them to examine and they were asked to respond--it was done formally and informally.

Evidence of collaboration between central office and schools and between teachers and school administrators also was plentiful.

> Principal: We are seeking a lot of collaboration between the administrators and teachers, teachers and students, parents, everybody, realizing

that they are all a piece of this whole puzzle, and we all have to put the pieces together to make it work.

Teacher: We are making decisions ourselves in collaboration with administrators and supervisory people.... And we've seen what has happened. We have really seen the growth in our children because of our efforts.

Revisiting the Model: Organizational Efficacy and Focus on Children

The elements of the Kirby and Bogotch (1993) model do assist in our understanding of restructuring in St. Charles Parish. Information and decision participation as organizational values, as well as collaboration, experimentation, and reflection as empowerment processes, appear to influence the district's perceived success in its change initiatives. We found that two additional processes were influential in St. Charles. Continuous learning, including scanning for information and dissemination (important central office functions), permeates all levels. Everyone was "in training." This is a necessary antecedent to the processes of experimentation and reflection which deserves explicit recognition in a model of effective information utilization.

The fifth process necessary in the model is focusing on children. This process is not de facto related to the organizational values of information and decision participation. Instead, a third value influences and is influenced by these other core values. We call this value organizational efficacy. The overwhelming sentiment in St. Charles was not only that all children CAN learn but that the collective "system" had the responsibility to ensure that all children WOULD learn. Over and over we heard that change for the sake of change was not the intention in St. Charles. Change was consistently and passionately related to a valuing of students' need to learn.

The emerging literature on organizational learning supports organizational efficacy as an essential component of "generative" or "transforming" organizations (McGill, Slocum, & Lei, 1993). This literature concurs that knowledge is a primary power base and that collaboration is the optimal decision structure. More importantly, it highlights the moral dimension of organizational life and the moral use of power. Strategic characteristics of generative learning organizations include change as the source of strength and making a meaningful difference as a core competence. Thus, power in restructuring schools lies in the organization's ability to make a meaningful difference for all children. Interacting with other core values, organizational efficacy increases the demands for participative decision authority and information, but also is itself increased as experimentation leads to improved student outcomes. In the words of one central office administrator: "[Once teachers are] empowered, they see they can make a difference in children's lives, and then we have a change in the culture, and then we have a change in the classroom."

Conclusion

In conclusion, we find that power lies in the values that organizations both espouse and practice. Empowerment is not confined to the granting of decision authority. This traditional view is quite limited; at best, it is misinformed, at worst, it is dangerous. Decision authority must be complemented by information access and organizational efficacy with regard to student learning. When empowerment includes authority, knowledge, and efficacy, organizational transformation is possible. Although we do not provide empirical evidence of improved student outcomes, we contend that the commitment, personal efficacy, and satisfaction of teachers in St. Charles Parish support the Kirby and Bogotch model (modified to include organizational efficacy) of effective school restructuring. We believe that this study has provided support of the model with regard to core values and key processes. The next phase of our research on empowerment in restructuring schools will include assessment of the relationship of the core values to actual student and teacher outcomes.

Figure 2 depicts our revised model of empowerment for effective school restructuring. We add organizational efficacy, that is, the belief that schools can make a difference for all children, to our core values. They are systemic, collective values that are interactive and interdependent. With the addition of this third core value, we believe that we move from a technical model to a moral model for school empowerment. Indeed, the collective efficacy dimension is what distinguishes this model from earlier understandings of information processing. As early as 1973, Galbraith offered two suggestions for increasing the capacity for information processing: (1) invest in the formal organizational structures (done in St. Charles through professional development) and (2) increase lateral decision-making processes through new roles and decentralization (also practiced in St. Charles restructuring). What Galbraith (and our earlier model) failed to include was the moral element of purposive restructuring.

Still missing from the model are the roles of students, parents, and the community in school restructuring. Although we provide some evidence that student efficacy is a goal of the St. Charles experience, our data in this area are limited at this time. Nevertheless, we believe that this district's story is a powerful example of the changes in roles, relationships, and decision making that result from restructuring through decision participation, information use, and organizational efficacy.

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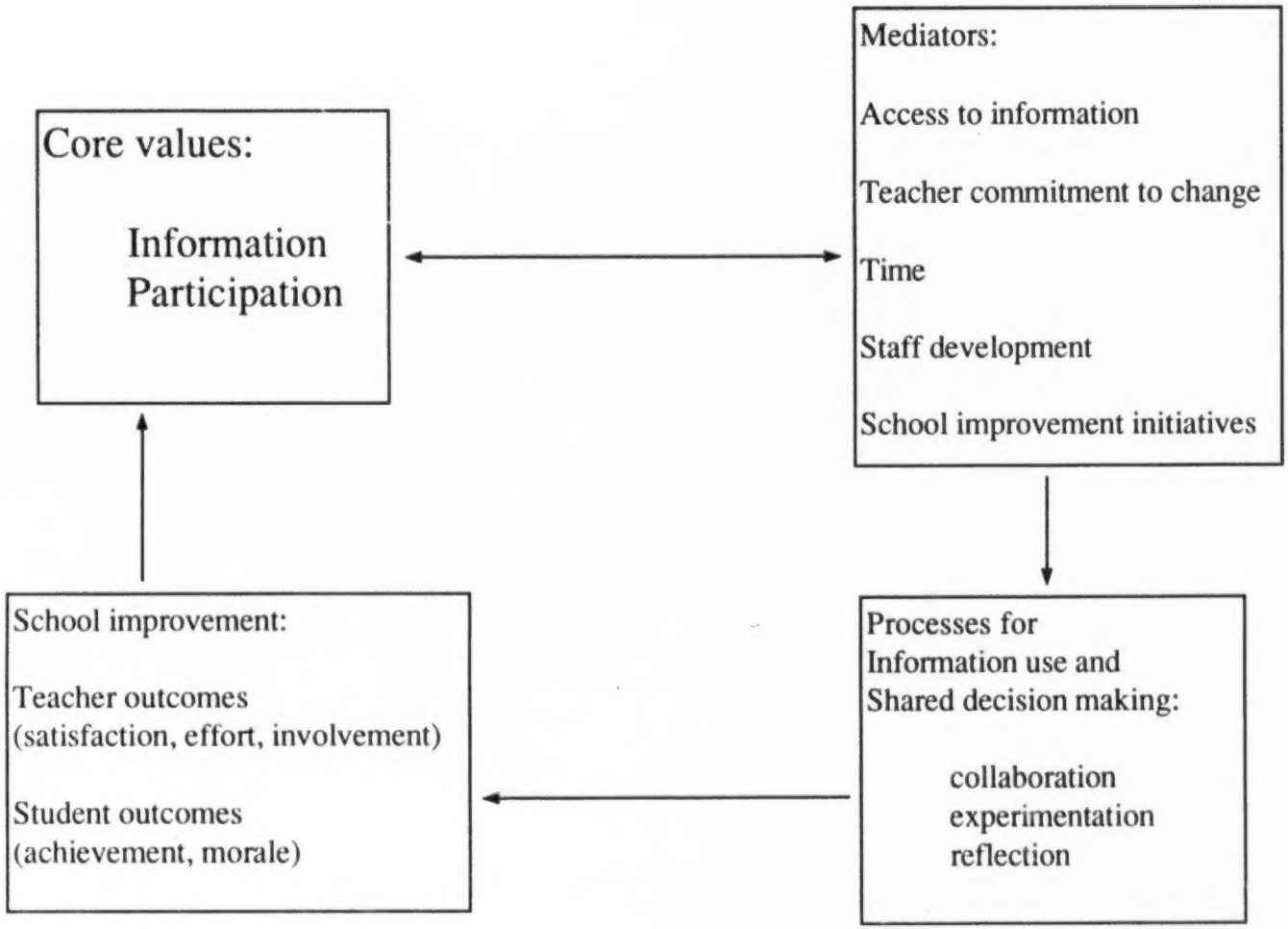

Fig. 1. Kirby and Bogotch (1993) model of information and participation in school improvement

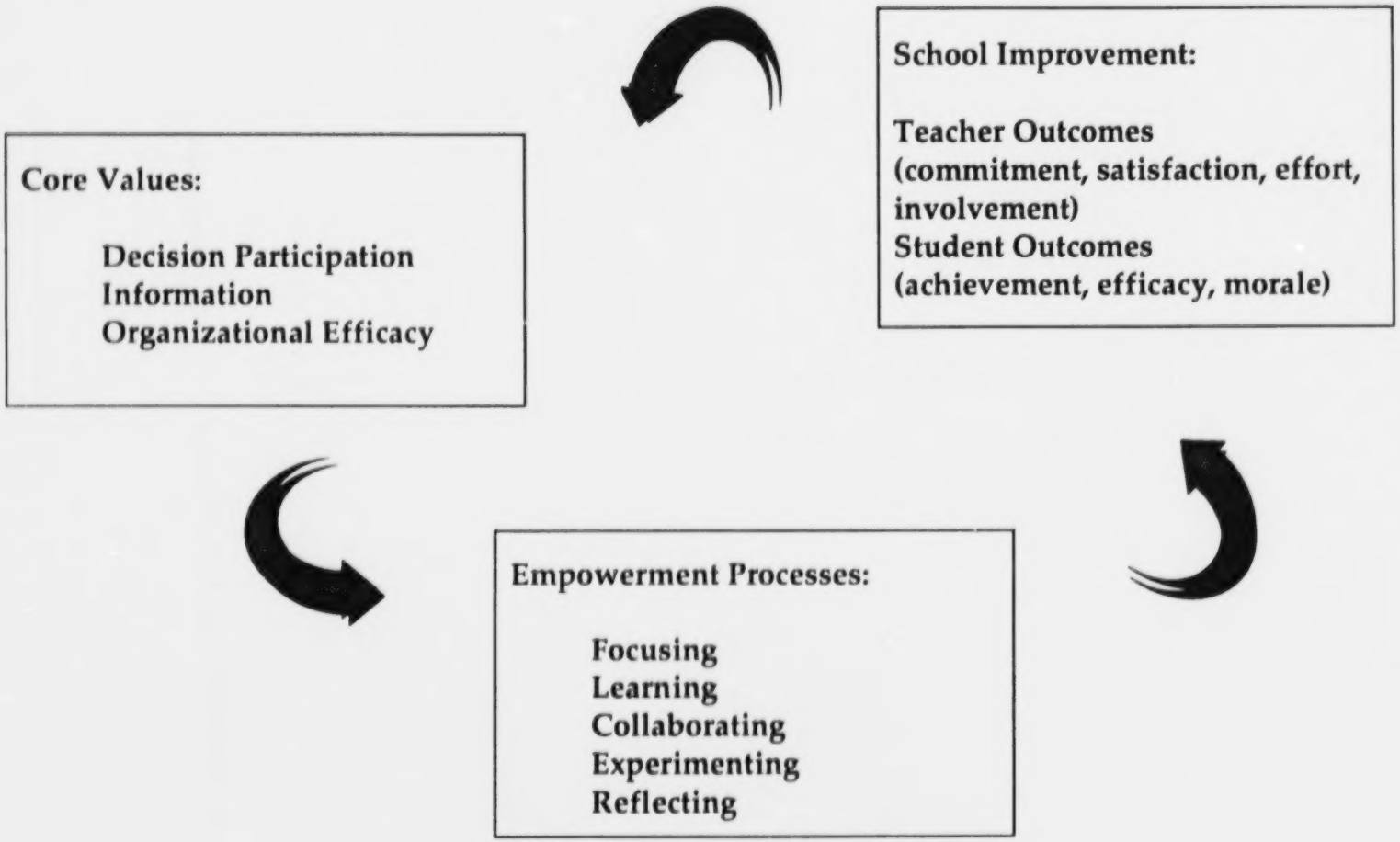

Fig. 2. School improvement through purposive, collective, and informed practice